the State of Tamil Nadu since as per information available with the Government, no evidence of coal reserves has so far been detected in the State. Therefore, the question of payment of royalty to the Government of Tamil Nadu for coal mining does not arise. However, a proposal for enhancement of the existing rate of royalty on lignite has been received from Government to Tamil Nadu and is under consideration of the Government.

Exploration and mining of coal by private sector companies

3456. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of MINES AND MINERALS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have cleared the proposal to allow private sector companies into exploration and mining of coal and lignite;

(b) if so, which are the coal and lignite areas earmarked for private sector;

(c) the steps taken to amend the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act, 1973 for the purpose; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES & MINERALS [DR. (SMT.) RITA VERMA]: (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Earmarking of coal and lignite areas for the private sector has not yet been done by the Government.

(c) and (d) The Goa! Mines (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill, 2000 proposes to induct a new provision in the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973 for non-captive coal and lignite mining as well as exploration of coal and lignite- resources by the Indian companies.

Proposals to merge BALCO and NALCO

3457. SHRI ANANTA SETHI: Will the Minister of MINES AND MINERALS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to merge Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) with the National Aluminium Company (NALCO);

(b) if so, the reasons for the merger of these two premier companies; and

(c) the steps taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES AND MINERALS (DR. (SMT.) RITA VERMA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Does not arise.

Import of Spares for Walking Dragling

3458. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of Mines and Minerals be pleased to state:

(a) whether Northern Coalfields Ltd. is continuing to import spares for walking dragling manufactured and supplies to it by the ailing Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is a fact that HEC offered to get the job of reconditioning done at five percent less cost then quoted by the US-based Bucyras International for reconditioning of dragling; and

(d) if so, the reasons for not helping the HEC by placing orders for repairs and reconditioning etc.?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES AND MINERALS (DR. (SMT.) RITA VERMA): (a) to (d) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Accidents in Coal Mines

†3459. SHRI SHIBU SOREN: Will the Minister of Mines and Minerals be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that lakhs of people have been affected due to fire and landslides in the Jhariya and Raniganj area of Bharat Coking Coal Limited;

(b) if so, the comprehensive details thereof;

(c) whether any study group has been set up by Government to conduct studies in this regard;

(d) if so, the details of the report and suggestions made therein; and

(e) the action being taken/proposed to be taken by Government to

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.